



Spc. Joshua L. Humphries spends some deployment downtime in his Camp Lemonnier tent writing a letter to his father. Humphries, a soldier in Bravo Co., 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, said keeping in contact with family and friends helps prevent feelings of homesickness.

Deployed troops keep active, in contact to avoid homesickness

Story and photo by Spc. Eric M. McKeeby

Spc. Joshua L. Humphries misses his father. His father, a pastor at a church in Wilmington, Ohio, provided counsel in times of need.

"Every time I needed someone to talk to, I went to my dad," Humphries said.

Humphries is currently deployed to the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa with the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, "The Old Guard," Bravo Company. The company has supported Operation Enduring Freedom out of CJTF-HOA headquarters at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, since December.

While Humphries admits to missing his family, fiancé and friends in "the states," he said he keeps from becoming homesick by communicating regularly with home.

"I write letters, but I like using the phone a lot more because you can hear their voice, and it makes you feel a lot closer to home," Humphries said.

In the Old Guard's first deployment in three decades, soldiers have settled into the life and missions of CJTF-HOA, finding various ways to prevent the blues that may arise from being miles away from beloved persons and places.

Soldiers like Humphries have assuaged feelings

of loneliness through means varying from pumping iron to putting pen to paper.

Remaining in good mental spirits is crucial to the success of missions, said Lt. Richard J. Bardsley, executive officer of Bravo Company.

"A soldier needs to be focused militarily to complete a mission," Bardsley said. "If he's not allowed time to recover mentally through non-military activities, you run the risk of burning our soldiers out mentally and physically in this very adverse environment."

The need for mentally and spiritually satisfied soldiers is pressing but not always satisfied in a deployed environment, said Navy Cmdr. William M. Hall, the executive officer and senior medical officer of the Expeditionary Medical Unit at Camp Lemonnier.

"You have isolated youth with time on their hands in an isolated duty station," Hall said. "Add in simply being away from home, and that's loneliness."

Forward deployed locations typically have a higher rate of depression among soldiers than state-side bases, Hall said. He added, however, that he has seen fewer depressed troops at CJTF-HOA than would be typical for a deployed base.

"There's been a handful here, but not as much as you would expect in your average population," Hall said. "I've been very pleased."

Bardsley said the morale of Bravo Co. soldiers remains high.

By walking through the company's living tents and speaking to soldiers daily, he said he is able to gauge the attitudes of soldiers.

"I don't always ask them how they feel, but I'll ask an unrelated question. By the attitude of their response, I can figure out their mental state," Bardsley said.

Both Hall and Bardsley said they attribute the high morale to soldiers' constant involvement in a number of activities.

"The high op-tempo of our unit helps keep our soldiers' minds focused," Bardsley said. "When there is down time, there are such activities as going to orphanages, religious services or athletic activities that are available."

Another way to avoid homesickness is by maintaining connections to home, Hall said.

"It's like a lifeline that anchors us to the here and

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